

**Address by Dr the Hon Timothy Harris, Minister of Finance,
International Trade, Industry, Commerce and Consumer Affairs of St
Kitts and Nevis, on the occasion of the commemoration of Financial
Information Month, October 2009**

I am indeed very grateful and pleased to be afforded the opportunity today to address you, the people of the Federation, on the fundamentals of saving, spending and investing.

My profound appreciation is extended to the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank (ECCB) for providing me with this privilege to participate in its outreach program to mark Financial Information Month. Financial Information Month is geared to spreading sound financial knowledge across the region during October.

Ever since 2001, the ECCB has been collaborating with public sector agencies, financial institutions, other private sector businesses, the media and community groups in providing and promoting a regional financial education campaign.

Hence, the commemoration of October as Financial Information Month is now a permanent feature on the official calendar of member states of the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank Currency Area. It is a month in which special and greater focus is given to the improvement of the public's understanding of financial and economic matters.

This year's theme is, "Save and Invest Today.... Enjoy Tomorrow" and it seeks to underscore the importance of savings, wise investments and long-term financial planning as key concepts in building a secure future.

The theme is consistent with the ultimate objective of the initiative for Financial Information Month, which is to empower all persons to make the types of saving, spending and investing choices that will lead each individual to build wealth, become financially independent and retire in comfort.

One would undoubtedly and readily agree that the tenor of this year's theme reverberates from the old adage "Save for a rainy day," which has never resonated more loudly, in the past fifty years, than it has done during this year.

In bygone years, our fore parents, though blessed with much less resources and opportunities than us, were very skilful in the art of saving, investing and spending.

They clearly understood the need to put some little thing aside, and some of them were so skilful at this craft, that it was often said that “they knew how to save a dollar out of fifty cents”.

Their ability to save was not only driven by setting aside a particular portion of the little money which they earned, but also by the principle of careful spending. For many of them, the remark “they don’t spend a bad penny” was keenly applicable.

Hence, the benefits which they achieved, through prudent saving and spending approaches, enabled them to invest in the purchase of animals such as goats, sheep and cattle, as well as land and houses, where possible.

Admittedly, the environment in which they operated fifty years ago was quite restrictive, so that it was very normal to save money in and under their beds, in cans, under the earth, through “partner hand” arrangements, Sunday School banking and at the Industrial Bank, which was better known as the “Penny Bank”, and which later became the St Kitts Nevis Anguilla National Bank.

While some of these practices do still exist to varying degrees, the modern environment, in which saving, spending and investing are carried out, is much more complex and sophisticated. Nowadays, these activities are done through a wide range of institutions such as banks, credit unions, insurance entities, stock markets and investment companies, which collectively comprise the financial marketplace.

It is because of the complexity and sophistication of the marketplace why the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank continues to educate our citizens and residents on the importance of understanding how the marketplace operates. The goal of this exercise is to ensure that all of our people, especially our large and growing number of youngsters, become knowledgeable and empowered in healthy money management practices.

As a consequence, it is expected that they will acquire the necessary competence, capability and confidence in dealing with the marketplace, and

thereby lead to the realization of a lifetime of relative financial security and peace.

Attainment of these qualities will equip individuals to deal positively with their personal finances, so that they will be better able to make weekly or monthly household or personal budgets, and balance these budgets.

In addition, they will be well positioned to establish targeted plans to meet future obligations and needs; monitor the movement of their money; remain current with financial issues; and make sensible decisions concerning financial products, such as certificates of deposits, credit cards and bonds.

This year's Financial Information Month of the E C CB incorporates broad spectrum projects, with the potential for a far-reaching exposition of the "rich" ideas that it has to share with the public.

Particular attention will be paid to school children who, more than ever, on a daily basis, have a responsibility for the management of money, be it pocket change, lunch or snack money or bus fare.

These activities proposed for Financial Literacy Month include, but are not limited to the following:

- Discussions with community groups and businesses
- The Everyday Financial Heroes programme
- Primary Schools Short Story Contest
- High School Mentorship Programme
- Presentations at Parent-Teachers Meetings
- Daily tips on money management and investing
- Newspaper Articles on financial matters
- Logo and theme of Financial Information Month printed on Island Purified Water bottles
- T-shirts sporting the theme and logo, and
- Street banners promoting the theme and logo.

I must express my extreme delight with the ongoing development of this information and education initiative of the E C CB, which will unmistakably enhance the ability of the citizens and residents, of the member states of the Eastern Caribbean Currency Union to make intelligent judgments about their personal finances.

To the entire populace, I urge you to avail yourselves of the many opportunities to acquire the techniques which will be shared through the Financial Information Month endeavour, and to convert them into lifelong skills.

In so doing, they will redound to your own personal benefit and that of the Nation as well.

In closing, I take this opportunity to congratulate and commend the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank for a very well designed programme of activities to celebrate this year's initiative, and to proudly and publicly declare the launch of Financial Information Month, October 2009.

Thank you for listening, and may God bless us all.